



Memorandum

TO: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FROM: Angel Rios, Jr.

SUBJECT: SAN JOSÉ FAMILY CAMP AT YOSEMITE

DATE: February 23, 2015

Approved

Date

COUNCIL DISTRICT: Citywide

RECOMMENDATION

Accept staff's update on San José Family Camp at Yosemite (Family Camp), and recommend that City Council direct the City Manager to:

1. Begin discussions and negotiations with the United States Forest Service (USFS) for a long-term agreement to continue operation of the Family Camp program beyond the current lease agreement, which is set to expire December 31, 2016; and
2. Return to the City Council for approval of the long-term lease of Family Camp following negotiations with the USFS.

OUTCOME

Direction to negotiate a long-term lease agreement with the USFS that will allow continued operation at Family Camp.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department (PRNS) is seeking direction to negotiate a new long-term Special Use Permit/Land Lease Agreement with the USFS to operate Family Camp on federal land. The USFS prefers lease agreements that are 20 years in length. Family Camp is approximately a two and a half hour drive east of the City of San José and is situated on 46.8 acres of federal land. The City owns the physical improvements and structures at Camp but the land is leased from the USFS. It is located off State Route 120, 15 miles east of Groveland, California, and 10 miles west of the northern entrance to Yosemite National Park.

The City operates a seasonal program at Family Camp from April through September. The program consists of pre-, post-, and summer seasons. Participation consists of shoulder season facility rentals and full service summer season reservations. The summer season program draws the majority of campers from San José and the greater Bay Area. The program also partners with local San José job readiness programs and provides work experience to local youth and young adults. The program has a robust volunteer program that draws from non-profit, private and corporate entities.

Family Camp experienced a 50% occupancy rate in the 2014 summer season and projects incremental increases to 100% over the next four to five years.

BACKGROUND

The City purchased the improvements at Family Camp from the City of Oakland through a procurement process and, on February 26, 1968, the City Council approved the first Special Use Permit/Land Lease with the USFS to operate Family Camp as a City of San José (City) program.

Family Camp is a 46.8 acre site, situated on federal land which is leased from the USFS, and has been managed and utilized by the City for nearly fifty years. Family Camp provides 70 wood-framed and canvas covered platform-tents scattered among the pines and oak trees along the Middle Fork of the Tuolumne River. Campers enjoy three staff-prepared meals a day, which are served cafeteria-style in the dining hall. Other camp amenities include an amphitheater, archery range, gift shop, laundry facilities, nature center, patio and deck area, a large playfield, restrooms, showers, service buildings and a tot play area. Family Camp also maintains potable water wells and a sewage evaporation pond facility.

Recreational camps like Family Camp play an important role in exposing families, children and adults to the natural wilderness environment. A trip to Family Camp is often the very first wilderness experience many San José families have, and for some urban youth, Family Camp is the first experience outside of San José. Family Camp provides an opportunity for children raised in metropolitan areas to gain an appreciation of the great outdoors and provides a safe environment for visitors to bond, grow closer and build relationships as a unit and with other families and friends in a safe environment; Family Camp is a retreat from urban life, where campers of all ages can fish, hike, swim and participate in organized activities and interpretive programs, or just relax and enjoy the beautiful mountain scenery. Family Camp is open to anyone, not just San José residents

Summer staff is recruited from local jobs programs like Center for Employment Training, San José Conservation Corps, San José Job Corps, Work2Future and local college campuses with programs specializing in park management and recreation. Recruitment efforts have resulted in 17% of the workforce hired from San José Job Corps Training Center. Additionally, over half of the workforce is from the San José area and nearly half of those are from local community colleges and universities. In 2012, San José Job Corps recognized Family Camp as the Work-Based Learning Partner of the Year. In that same year, Family Camp received a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for outstanding service to youth.

Family Camp begins operations on the last weekend in April for opening day of trout fishing in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and closes in October for the winter. Family Camp occupancy ranges from 70 to 300 campers per night, with a summer support staff of approximately 40 to 60 seasonal employees and volunteers. The summer program operates seven days a week from mid-June through mid-August, with complete in-house meal services and a variety of structured recreational and interpretive activities. Private groups may reserve Family Camp during the spring and fall shoulder seasons. Family Camp hosts various community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, the YMCA, school groups, and various non-profit and for-profit organizations.

Approximately 70% of all individual campers are San José residents. 2014 reservations totals included County of Santa Clara residents making up 82% of total 2014 summer reservations, with San José residents representing 65% of total reservations. Additionally, Family Camp has a “campership” program that awards scholarships to qualifying lower-income families, which can offset up to 50% of the costs of a total reservation.

ANALYSIS

Contract

In 2012, at the direction of the City Council, the City entered into a modified special use permit/land lease agreement with the USFS for a reduced term of five years in place of the standard 20 year lease agreement. The modified permit was sought to assist in determining if continuing the Family Camp program was fiscally sustainable before entering into a standard USFS lease agreement for a 20 year period. The City is entering into the fourth year of the current five year lease agreement which ends December 31, 2016. The Family Camp program is expanding not only in camper participation but also in regards to partnering, hiring and placement of youth with local job training programs, and collaborative partnerships with the California Conservation Corps and the Tuolumne River Trust. These collaborative partnerships will potentially lead to funding and grant opportunities and also make Family Camp a job training experience destination.

Financial Performance

Family Camp has experienced two significant setbacks over the past five years which have impacted capacity and financial performance. The first setback was related to structural repairs to the dining hall, which caused the entire camp to be closed for the 2010 summer season. This resulted in Family Camp going from an 89% occupancy rate in 2009 to a 59% occupancy rate in 2011. The second setback was the 2013 Rim Fire. Fortunately, the fire skipped over most of Family Camp, but the devastation of the surrounding areas and the work that needed to be accomplished to re-open camp hampered the City’s ability to effectively market the summer 2014 season.

Despite these setbacks, Family Camp has seen a significant increase in capacity and revenues over the past two summer seasons. Family Camp went from an occupancy rate of 39% in 2013 to over 50% in 2014. The success of the 2014 summer season generated a 17% increase in revenue compared to 2013. With recent changes to the support staff, programming, and outreach, a 100% occupancy rate may be achieved as program awareness and demand increases. With a projected yearly occupancy rate increase of 15%, a 100% occupancy rate may be achieved by 2019. The following table outlines program performance, participation, and operating revenues and expenditures for the last four years, and projections for the 2015 season (2015-2016).

Season	Occupancy Rate	Campers	Revenue	Expenditures	Net Revenue ²
2011	59.0%	3,612	\$545,536	\$511,536	\$34,006
2012	42.0%	1,861	\$393,204	\$525,741	(\$132,536)
2013	39.0%	1,874	\$335,755	\$484,012	(\$148,258)
2014¹	50.4%	3,392	\$404,422	\$600,000	(\$192,000)
2015¹	58.0%	3,900	\$470,000	\$560,000	(\$90,000)

¹ Projected

² These numbers do not include indirect or capital costs, but do include direct General Fund costs. Indirect costs applied to personnel costs vary from year to year and were roughly \$120,000 for the 2013 season. In the 2013 season, capitals costs for the site's lease payment to the USFS were \$33,032, and infrastructure renovation costs were \$45,434, partly offset by the capital surcharge created in 2012 (\$45,053)

As noted in the above table, occupancy increased significantly in 2014 and staff estimates that it will continue to increase for the 2015 summer season. As staff continues to implement improvements to Family Camp operations and partnerships, the occupancy and cost recovery rates are expected to continue to increase. The occupancy rate is expected to approach 100% by summer 2019.

Capital Investment

As can be seen in the preceding section, the majority of the costs to operate Family Camp are recovered through revenue collection and the program is on the road to full recovery of operational costs. However, as Family Camp continues to age, it is also important to lessen its impact on the City's Capital budget. In order to account for this, a capital surcharge was established, with all funding collected from the surcharge being allocated to the Family Camp Capital Improvements Reserve in the Parks City-Wide Construction and Conveyance (C&C) Tax Fund. Currently, the Family Camp Capital Improvements Reserve totals \$110,000, which is available for future capital improvement needs at Family Camp. This surcharge over time will allow Family Camp to be less reliant on the Parks City-Wide C&C Tax Fund and the General Fund; as without the reserve funding received from the surcharge, capital improvement needs at Family Camp would be requested to be funded from the Parks City-Wide C&C Tax Fund Ending Fund Balance or the General Fund.

Fortunately, a number of capital needs were taken care of through disaster relief funds resulting from the 2013 Rim Fire. The forest fire resulted in damaged infrastructure, structures and trees. The City's Fire Insurance Policy covered much of the costs of repairs, with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) providing disaster relief funding to address insurance policy gaps. Fortunately, the majority of the repairs addressed a significant amount of deferred maintenance and planned renovation work. Examples include: all new potable wells, water tanks and supply lines, 14 new tent structures, the addition of four Americans with Disabilities Act accessible camper tents, removal of hazardous trees, noxious weeds and replacement of archaeological sensitive area barriers. Renovation of the meadow, including irrigation repairs, resulted in improved usability. The sewer pond area received upgrades to the replacement spray field, fencing repairs and replacement of pond aerators. To date, the cost of fire-related repairs is estimated at \$1,400,000. A large percentage of these costs are covered by insurance and FEMA and Cal OES disaster relief funds.

Master Plan

The USFS requested that the City provide a comprehensive evaluation of Family Camp facilities, and identify opportunities to renovate the facilities and ensure regulatory compliance. The USFS requested this information be presented in a master plan format, which was used to define the City's proposed project for environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Master Development Plan was submitted to the USFS for review in 2014. The City anticipates results of the review in 2015. If the Master Plan is approved, the USFS will outline any deliverables or improvements that can take place during the new lease period.

Collaborative Partnerships

For 2015, staff will continue to focus on expanding collaborative partnerships with local area groups, corporations, and volunteers. Below are examples of new collaborations:

- California Conservation Corps (CCC) – Many of Family Camp's identified capital improvement projects were addressed during the repairs and reconstruction of damage caused by the Rim Fire; however, replacement of the dining hall building is a high priority given its age and use. PRNS is exploring a collaborative partnership with the CCC. If successful, this partnership may result in establishing a base of operations at Family Camp for the CCC to service the Northern Sierra region while still allowing for Family Camp operations. In exchange, PRNS is interested in having the CCC construct a new Family Camp dining hall, in addition to allowing construction of an operations building for the CCC. The CCC may be able to provide some funding for the joint project. USFS approval would be required.
- Tuolumne River Trust (Trust) – PRNS has met with the Trust and is exploring a collaboration that will potentially provide onsite Family Camp improvement projects to be undertaken by the Trust volunteer program. The Trust will also be providing forest health and restoration projects in and around the Family Camp area.

The Family Camp program will continue to work with current volunteer groups and seek to expanded volunteer opportunities. Below are examples of current volunteer efforts:

- Friends of Family Camp (Friends) – a non-profit organization, provides volunteer assistance in the opening, closure and enhancement of Family Camp facilities. It has been conducting periodic work parties at Family Camp since inception, and continues to the present day to support site maintenance, Family Camp repairs and modest fundraising activities.
- Family Camp Nurse Program – Volunteer nurses provided over 120 hours of medical assistance, addressing any non-emergency medical services to campers and staff during the summer season.

- San José Parks Foundation – The San José Parks Foundation provided \$4,000 towards this year's radio campaign marketing efforts.
- Society of American Foresters – Staff has partnered with the Society of American Foresters, based in Moccasin, CA, to bring camp professionals such as hydrologists and foresters to provide nature education opportunities for staff and campers.
- Groveland District Rangers – Staff has established a relationship with Groveland District Rangers from the Stanislaus National Forest. Various Rangers directed extra nature activities once a week to campers during the summer season. The head District Ranger continues to volunteer time as a speaker for various pre- and post-season rental groups.
- Corporate Volunteers – Staff is working with various corporate volunteer programs, such as with NVidia, which provided 24 volunteer hours this season, and exploring opportunities to work with groups locally, and on site, at Family Camp.
- Mel Cotton's Sporting Goods – A collaborative partnership was established with Mel Cotton's Sporting Goods. Mel Cotton's included Family Camp at Yosemite in their spring marketing outreach, and also provided booth space at their Annual Spring Fishing Expo. In addition, a 20% discount coupon is included with each Family Camp registration.

Conclusion

The Family Camp program provides a unique, easy and affordable Sierra Nevada wilderness experience for San José and bay area residents. Additionally, Family Camp provides work experiences for local San José youth and young adults, collaborative partnerships and relationships with local business, government agencies, Colleges, Universities and At Risk youth programs. Family Camp will incrementally increase its occupancy rate and collaborative partnerships, which in turn will create a wilderness destination at a cost neutral operation.

In conclusion, PRNS will continue to operate Family Camp at Yosemite efficiently and effectively by:

- Working with current partners and expanding new partnerships.
- Working with youth employment agencies to employ local youth as staff at Family Camp at Yosemite.
- Completing the Family Camp Master Plan with the USFS, including any required capital improvement projects.
- Seeking and exploring collaborative and cost sharing partnerships with governmental non-governmental organization (NGO) groups to further the Family Camp program.
- Continuing the restoration, removal and repair of fire damaged structures, trees and systems.
- Continuing and expanding wilderness and educational opportunities for families and underserved groups in San José and surrounding areas.
- Negotiating a new long-term lease agreement with the USFS before expiration of the current lease agreement in 2016.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

PRNS staff will continue to provide yearly program updates to the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Portions of this report have been discussed with the Friends of Family Camp. This report was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on March 4, 2015.

COORDINATION

The report was coordinated with the City Attorney and the City Manager's Budget Office.

CEQA

Not a Project; File No. PP10-069 (a), City Organizational and Administrative Activities

/s/

ANGEL RIOS, JR.

Interim Director of Parks, Recreation and
Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Steve Hammack, Deputy Director, at (408) 793-5579.